

FY 2006 NIH Director's Pioneer Award

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

Why has the NIH Director established the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Many scientists who participated in the development of the NIH Roadmap expressed the view that a new program might be necessary to identify scientists with ideas that have the potential for high impact, but that may be too novel, span too diverse a range of disciplines, or be at a stage too early to fare well in the traditional peer review process. In response, NIH launched the NIH Director's Pioneer Award (NDPA) Program in 2004. This program is meant to complement NIH's traditional, investigator-initiated grant programs by supporting individual scientists of exceptional creativity who propose pioneering approaches to major contemporary challenges in biomedical research. The term "pioneering" is used to describe highly innovative approaches that have the potential for producing an unusually high impact. Biomedical research is defined broadly in this program as encompassing scientific investigations in the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, mathematical sciences, and other relevant disciplines.

What distinguishes the NIH Director's Pioneer Award from other NIH programs?

The NIH Director's Pioneer Award Program is different in several ways. First, it is designed to support people with uniquely creative ideas, rather than projects. The award will provide up to \$500,000 direct costs per year for five years to a select few exceptionally creative investigators, to pursue innovative, pioneering research with the potential to produce tomorrow's conceptual and technological breakthroughs. The only constraint on the research to be done with this award is that it must be relevant to the NIH mission (<http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/>). Second, the information required in the application is highly abbreviated, and turnaround is accelerated. Third, the procedure for evaluating applicants (described below) is distinct from the traditional NIH peer review, "study section" process and will be based on review of the individual's potential to make seminal contributions toward solving an important biomedical research problem. Biomedical research is defined broadly in this program as encompassing scientific investigations in the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, and mathematical sciences.

How many awards will be made in 2006? Will additional awards be made in subsequent years?

The NIH Director expects to make 5–10 awards in FY 2006, depending on the quality of applications and the availability of funds. Additional awards will be made in each of Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008.

Do Pioneer Awards include indirect costs?

The institutional indirect costs will be paid in addition to the award.

How much time/effort are recipients expected to devote?

Awardees are expected to commit the major portion (at least 51 percent) of their *research* time/effort to activities supported by the NDPA.

If 50% of my time is devoted to clinical and/or teaching duties, and only 50% to research, how much time/effort would I be expected to devote to Pioneer Award activities?

If you spend 50% of your time doing research, you would be required to devote the major portion (at least 51 percent) of your research time, or 26% of your total time, to Pioneer Award activities.

What post-award requirements must I fulfill?

Although there are no stipulations on the research agenda, you will be required to submit a two to five page annual report of your activities during the year and to participate in an annual symposium in Bethesda, MD. In addition, to help the NIH evaluate this program, you may be contacted periodically for at least five years and asked to report on your latest research efforts.

May two or more scientists apply as a team for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Since the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are meant to support a person, not a specific project, applications must come from individual investigators, not from teams of investigators. One investigator from the team should apply and explain that, if an award is made, the other person(s) would collaborate.

From which disciplines does NIH wish to draw applicants for the NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

The NIH encourages applications from scientists from all disciplines, including the biological, behavioral, clinical, social, physical, chemical, computational, engineering, and mathematical sciences, who provide evidence of interest in exploring topics of relevance to the NIH mission.

Are these awards renewable?

No. These awards are intended to jump-start or redirect an individual's research program. Awardees are expected to seek future support through traditional routes.

Are women and members of underrepresented minority groups encouraged to apply?

The NIH recognizes that there are many outstanding and highly innovative women scientists, as well as outstanding scientists who are members of minority groups underrepresented in biomedical research, and strongly encourages these individuals to nominate themselves. NIH is increasing its outreach through advertisements and notices to scientific organizations. NIH also plans to aggressively recruit an appropriately diverse group to serve as evaluators at the various stages of the selection process.

How many submissions were received in previous years?

Approximately 1400 individuals submitted nominations in 2004 and 840 in 2005.

How will the program be administered?

The NIH Director's Pioneer Award Program will be administered separately from all other research grant programs. Staff of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences will administer the program on behalf of the NIH Office of the Director.

2006 Application Process

Will the 2006 application process be the same as the 2005 process?

No, the application process for 2006 has been streamlined and is different from the process used in 2005.

Application requires two separate, concurrent steps: 1) submission of the application to Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>) and 2) submission of supplementary information to the NDPA Secure Web Site <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/Secure/Login.aspx>.

Applicants must also request letters of reference from three individuals. These letters must be submitted electronically to the NDPA Secure Web Site <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/LettersofReference.aspx>. Applications with fewer than three letters of reference will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated.

Detailed instructions for submitting an application for the 2006 NIH Director's Pioneer Award are at <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/ApplicationInstructions.aspx>.

What are the dates for submission of 2006 applications?

The Grants.gov application, supplementary information, and letters of reference must be submitted between **January 15, 2006** and **8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on February 27, 2006**.

Application materials will not be accepted after that time and applications that are not complete will not be evaluated.

What must be done before I submit an application to Grants.gov?

Important: You should immediately check with your sponsored research office to determine whether your institution is registered with Grants.gov. Please note that the registration process could take up to two weeks. The institution's Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) is responsible for completing the registration process.

If your institution is not already registered, it must first register with the Central Contractor Registry (the Credential Provider) at <http://www.ccr.gov/> and then with Grants.gov at <http://www.grants.gov/GetStarted>.

Both the institution and the applicant must also complete a one-time registration in the NIH eRA Commons in order to submit applications to NIH. Institutional officials are responsible for registering investigators in the eRA Commons. You should work with your AOR (also known as Signing Official in the eRA Commons) to determine your own institution's process for registration.

Where can I find help registering for Grants.gov?

For help with the Grants.gov registration process, contact Grants.gov customer support at 1-800-518-4726 (Toll Free), Monday–Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), or at support@grants.gov.

Where can I find help in submitting my application to Grants.gov?

For help with the technical aspects of submitting an application to Grants.gov, check the resources available on the Grants.gov website first (<http://grants.gov/>).

If you need assistance, contact Grants.gov customer support at 1-800-518-4726 (Toll Free), Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), or at support@grants.gov.

Where can I find help in registering for the eRA Commons?

Step-by-step directions for registering with eRa Commons are available at Grantee Registration Steps for Commons.

For questions regarding the Commons registration process, contact the NIH eRA Commons help desk at phone: 301-402-7469 or 866-504-9552 (Toll Free); 301-451-5939 (TTY) business hours Monday–Friday, 7:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time).

Whom do I contact if I have questions about programmatic aspects of the Pioneer Awards?

For questions of a programmatic nature, contact Shan McCollough at (301) 594-3555 or at pioneer@nih.gov.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about submitting the supplementary application information to the Pioneer Web site?

Contact Shan McCollough at (301) 594-3555 or at pioneer@nih.gov.

In the application package I downloaded from Grants.gov, the CFDA number is prefilled. However, the application instructions (Item 10) state that the CFDA number should be left blank. What should I do?

Do not change the prefilled number. The instructions on Grants.gov stating that the number should be left blank are in error.

I understand that in order to submit letters on my behalf, my referees must have my Application ID Number. How do I get an Application ID Number?

Following submission of the supplemental application information to the NDPA Secure Web site, the applicant will receive an e-mail confirmation that includes an Application ID Number and instructions for submitting letters of reference. Applicants must send the Application ID Number and the instructions to their referees, since the Application ID Number will be required when they submit their letters. The Application ID Number will enable the NDPA system to match the letters to the appropriate application.

Which do I have to submit first, the supplemental information or the Grants.gov application? Do I need the Grants.gov number to submit the supplemental information?

The order of submission does not matter. The submissions can be done concurrently and are independent. The Grants.gov tracking number is used only on the Grants.gov Web site and is unrelated to the Application ID Number. The Application ID Number is sent to the applicant's email address following submission of the supplemental application information to the NDPA Secure Web site.

I submitted an application to Grants.gov but it is not in my eRA Commons account. How will I know if the application was received?

An e-mail confirmation and a validation receipt will be sent to the AOR from Grants.gov.

Note that it may take several weeks for applications to appear in the ERA Commons. Although Pioneer Award applications are submitted electronically, they are processed manually and do not immediately appear in the applicants' eRA Commons accounts.

If I am submitting a journal article as my "most significant accomplishment," do I submit the entire publication, or a link to the publication?

If you are submitting a journal article, the entire publication must be submitted, not just a link to the article.

Is there a limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by an institution?

The instructions state that applicants (investigators) may submit only one application. There is no limit to the number of applications that an institution can submit.

One of my referees is from a foreign institution and does not have a DUNS number. Can my referee submit a reference letter without a DUNS number?

DUNS numbers are used internationally, so you should ask your referee to use a DUNS number, if possible. If your referee does not have a DUNS number, ask him or her to enter zeros – "0000" in place of the DUNS number.

Grants.Gov Application Documents

What format should I use for the documents submitted with my application to Grants.gov (abstract, essay, biosketch, current research support)?

Text should be single-spaced using a font size of 11 points or larger. A smaller font size may be used for figures, etc., as long as it is legible. Margins should be at least ¼ inch on all sides. The biosketch and the current research support should be in the standard PHS 398 format.

The PHS 398 biographical sketch template is available at
(<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>)

The PHS 398 current research support template is available at
(<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>)

Applicants with documents that exceed page limits will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated.

In my essay, may I include citations to key publications? If so, what is the appropriate format?

Yes, you may include citations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit. The citations may be in any format.

In my essay, may I include figures and illustrations?

Yes, you may include figures and illustrations in the essay, as long as they fit within the three to five page limit.

May I submit more than one publication or other achievement as my “most significant accomplishment”? May I include an introduction or explanation for my choice of accomplishment?

You may submit only one publication or other achievement. Applications that contain more than one publication or other achievement will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated. We will not accept introductions or explanations for your choice of accomplishment, although this information can be included in the 3 to 5 page essay.

Should my list of current research support include pending support?

You may include pending support, but this information is not required.

The application package that I downloaded from Grants.Gov does not include budget pages. Are detailed budgets required? Where do I indicate indirect costs?

Budgets are not required and indirect costs will be determined at the time the award is made.

Letters of Reference and Supplemental Application Information

How do my referees submit their letters in support of my application?

After you submit the supplementary application information to the NDPA Web site, you will receive an email containing detailed directions for submitting letters of reference that you can forward to your referees.

How will I know if my referees have submitted their letters?

You will receive an email confirming receipt of each letter. Approximately one week before the deadline for receipt of letters, you will receive an email indicating how many letters are missing or whether all three letters have been received. You will be responsible for contacting your referees to ensure that they submit their letters prior to the receipt deadline. Applications with fewer than three letters will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated.

Are there any system requirements for submitting my supplemental application information to the Pioneer Web site?

The supplemental application information can be submitted from both PC's and Macintosh computers. We suggest that you use Internet Explorer as your web browser.

Why is NIH requesting personal data?

The Public Health Service has a continuing commitment to monitor the operation of its review and award processes to detect – and deal appropriately with – any instances of real or apparent inequities with respect to age, sex, race, or ethnicity of the proposed awardees. The Personal Data Form will be stored separately from the rest of the nomination information. It will not be used as part of any stage of the evaluation. Data will be confidential and will be maintained in Privacy Act record system 09-25-0036, "Grants:IMPAC (Grant/Contract Information)." All analyses conducted on the date of birth, gender, race and/or ethnic origin data will report aggregate statistical findings only and will not identify individuals. If you decline to provide this information, it will no in way affect consideration of your application.

How can I check the status of my letters of reference?

Applicants may request an email listing the letters submitted in support of their applications at any time by going to <http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/pioneer/LORStatus.aspx>.

One of my referees is from a foreign institution and does not have a DUNS number. Can my referee submit a reference letter without a DUNS number?

DUNS numbers are used internationally, so you should ask your referee to use a DUNS number, if possible. If your referee does not have a DUNS number, ask him or her to enter zeros – "0000" in place of the DUNS number.

2006 Evaluation and Selection of Awardees

How will awardees be selected?

Applications will be reviewed first by NIH staff for eligibility and then by a multidisciplinary group of outside experts. Those applicants that are identified as the most outstanding will be invited to NIH for interviews in August, 2006. Interviews will be conducted by a panel of distinguished outside experts. The Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD), NIH, will conduct the final level of review. The Director, NIH, will make the final selection of awardees based on the evaluations by the outside experts, the recommendations of the ACD, and programmatic considerations. Final selections will be announced, and awards made, by the end of September, 2006.

What criteria will be used to assess applicants?

The evaluators are looking for convincing evidence that the applicant will pursue a pioneering approach to a problem of relevance to biomedical research. They will also assess whether alternative funding is already available to pursue this direction and whether there is compelling justification for the advantage of using the NPDA process rather than the standard peer review process. For more detail, see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-06-005.html>.

When will I be notified if I have been selected to come to the NIH for an interview?

Applicants will be notified on or about June 15, 2006 whether or not they have been selected for an interview.

When will the finalist interviews be held?

The finalist interviews will take place in August, 2006 at the NIH in Bethesda, Maryland.

When will the 2006 awardees be announced?

The 2006 awardees will be announced at the Second Annual NIH Director's Pioneer Award Symposium in September, 2006.

Can the decision of the panel of evaluators be appealed?

No. There is no appeal process

Will I receive a summary statement or other comments?

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will not receive summary statements or other comments.

Eligibility**Are individuals at all stages of their careers eligible?**

Yes, individuals at all career stages are eligible to apply. Those at early to middle stages of their careers, and women and members of groups underrepresented in biomedical research are especially encouraged to apply.

May individuals who applied in previous years who did not receive awards apply this year?

Yes, as long as they meet the other eligibility criteria [<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-06-005.html>].

Are foreign scientists eligible?

No. Applicants must either be U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals, or permanent residents of the United States. However, U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States who are employed in foreign institutions are eligible.

I am foreign scientist working in the U.S., and I have applied for a green card. Am I eligible?

You must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or permanent resident of the United States at the time of submission of your application. Holders of temporary visas are not eligible to submit an application.

Are individuals employed by government agencies, non-academic, and/or for-profit organizations eligible?

Individuals from all organizations that can otherwise apply to the NIH for funding and are willing to abide by the terms and conditions that NIH requires are eligible for this award.

Are scientists in the NIH Intramural Program eligible?

No. Because intramural scientists may not receive extramural NIH grants, they may not apply for an NIH Director's Pioneer Award.

Are individuals who have other support eligible? If so, may the awardee remain as principal investigator on his/her grant(s)?

Individuals who have other support are eligible for this award and may continue as principal investigator on other grants. However, awardees are expected to devote at least 51 percent of their research time/effort to this work. Since the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are expected to support distinctly new research, awards will not be made simply to enable investigators to expand research projects that are ongoing.

I am currently a postdoctoral fellow. Am I eligible to apply for an NIH Director's Pioneer Award?

Applicants must be able to show concrete evidence for their claim of innovativeness. This could be very difficult for a postdoctoral fellow who has never conducted independent research. In addition, like all NIH grants, the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards are made to institutions on behalf of investigators. Because most institutions will only authorize grant applications from individuals who are independent investigators, this could present an administrative barrier to applying.